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C O N F I D E N T I A L ALGIERS 001181

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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [KPOA](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [AG](#)  
SUBJECT: ALGERIA: PROMOTING THE PRESIDENT'S FREEDOM AGENDA

REF: A. STATE 88465  
[1](#)B. STATE 108924  
[1](#)C. ALGIERS 1016  
[1](#)D. ALGIERS 1115  
[1](#)E. ALGIERS 913  
[1](#)F. ALGIERS 912  
[1](#)G. ALGIERS 1114

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i. Thomas F. Daughton;  
reasons 1.4 (b, d)

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Advancing the President's Freedom Agenda has been an ongoing effort by Embassy Algiers since the arrival of the Ambassador in August 2006. The Ambassador and Embassy officers routinely meet with democracy and human rights activists, political parties, journalists, and other members of civil society. Embassy Algiers has consistently underscored the importance of freedom (particularly individual freedom), the ability of the individual to be an agent of change, and the value of a democratic form of government. END SUMMARY

EMBASSY ALGIERS' MSP  
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[1](#)2. (C) In its 2009 Mission Strategic Plan, Embassy Algiers has two principal objectives: 1) expanding bilateral counterterrorism cooperation and 2) expanding the country's political and economic space. Addressing the President's Freedom Agenda is the driving force behind our efforts to enlarge Algeria's political space. Algeria's colonial history, its long experience with single-party rule, and its fight against terrorism in the 1990's have combined to produce a state in which the security forces play a greater role in government than is healthy. Our attempts to promote freedom in this environment have focused on support for individuals and organizations that are either overtly calling for political change or can otherwise contribute to expansion of individual freedom. Our MSP Democracy Promotion goal includes a 2008 target for a legal framework that strengthens the functioning of local and international NGOs in Algeria, part of an ongoing strategy to create an environment in which individual freedom is valued.

[1](#)3. (U) Below per refs A and B is a listing of the activities undertaken in support of the Freedom Agenda since President Bush's June 2007 speech in Prague. (Note: The Ambassador was on assignment in Iraq during the month of July and on leave for much of August. Summer turnover in the Political/Economic section also impeded to some extent our normal activities on this issue. End note.)

MEETINGS WITH CIVIL SOCIETY  
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¶4. (C) Ambassador and poloffs meet regularly with members of civil society, always emphasizing elements of the Freedom Agenda, particularly the importance of citizen participation in Algeria's political space.

-- On June 9 and as part of the visit of DRL DAS Erica Barks-Ruggles, Ambassador met with Nadia Ait Zai and Louisa Smati and stressed the importance of individual actors making positive change in Algeria. Ait Zai directs local NGO and MEPI small grant recipient CIDDEF, which focuses on empowering women. Smati is the director of Dar Al-Hassana Women's Shelter, which also focuses on empowering women (ref C).

-- On June 10, also as part of the visit of DAS Barks-Ruggles, DCM met with members of civil society that had participated in programs administered by MEPI-funded NGO Freedom House. The meeting brought together a diverse group of individuals, including lawyers, journalists and members of civil society who spoke passionately about their experiences and plans to be agents of change in Algeria.

-- Poloffs met June 20 with Abdelrahame Chibane, president of the Algerian Muslim Scholars Association and former Religious Affairs minister, and discussed finding ways to counter Islamic extremism.

-- July 9, poloff met with Aicha Barki, head of Iqraa, an association that focuses on combating illiteracy, especially among women and children, to create a more politically aware citizenry. In the meeting, poloff emphasized the importance of citizens being informed about their government's activities.

-- Poloff met with human rights activist and lawyer Ali Yahia Abdenour July 18 to discuss his new book giving an historical assessment of human rights in Algeria. In the meeting, poloff raised the importance of engaging Algeria's youth to be political actors. (Note: Estimates indicate that 70% of Algeria's population is under 30.)

-- On July 31 and as part of the visit of DRL Management Analyst Ramiro Martinez, poloff met with Hocine Zehouane, president of the Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights (LADHD), one of the oldest human rights organizations in Algeria. In the meeting, we stressed the U.S. commitment to human rights and the ability of the individual to support positive change in Algeria.

-- Also as part of the Martinez visit, on July 31 poloff met with Meriem Belaala, president of local NGO SOS Femmes en Detresse, which focuses on empowering women. In this meeting, we discussed the evolution of women's rights in Algeria and DRL's role in funding democracy and human rights programming.

-- The Ambassador hosted a July 31 dinner with Amine Sidhoum, Lila Iril and Cherifa Kheddar, human rights activists who work on issues related to individuals who were disappeared in Algeria in the 1990s. Sidhoum, an attorney, also represents individuals who have been tortured while in official custody. The Ambassador emphasized our commitment to human rights and solicited views on ways the U.S. could support human rights in Algeria.

-- The Ambassador met with human rights activist and lawyer Ali Yahia Abdenour on August 4. He emphasized the U.S. commitment to human rights and solicited views on ways the U.S. could support human rights in Algeria (ref D).

#### MEETINGS WITH JOURNALISTS

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¶5. (C) Encouraging press freedom as a way to support individual freedom is a high priority for Embassy Algiers. While the Algerian print media is considerably more free than most other media in the region, journalists here are harassed by defamation lawsuits. This leads in turn to a certain

amount of media self-censorship.

-- On June 10, as part of the visit of DRL DAS Erica Barks-Ruggles, PAO met with members of the International Federation of Journalists (FIJ) and the National Union of Journalists (SNJ). The same day, the Ambassador hosted a lunch with journalists. In these encounters, we stressed the importance of a free press and advocated decriminalization of defamation. DAS Barks-Ruggles also discussed the Defending the Defenders fund (ref E).

-- With the arrival of post's new PAO, the Ambassador hosted a dinner for print media journalists on June 20. Throughout the dinner, the Ambassador stressed the importance of a free press and called for the decriminalization of defamation.

-- The Ambassador hosted a lunch on August 1 as part of the visit of DRL Management Analyst Martinez. The guests included members of the International Federation of Journalists (FIJ) and the National Union of Journalists (SNJ). At the lunch, the Ambassador stressed the importance of a free press and advocated the decriminalization of defamation.

#### MEETINGS WITH MEMBERS OF THE LEGAL COMMUNITY

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16. (C) Since the fall of 2006, Embassy Algiers has engaged members of the legal community to encourage them to continue to push for increased legal literacy and openness. Embassy Algiers has also supported training assistance through MEPI-funded American Bar Association (ABA) programming.

-- On June 9, the Ambassador hosted a dinner with prominent human rights attorneys Fatma Benbraham, Mostefa Bouchachi, Khaled Bourayou and Mohamed Tahri. He stressed the importance of a free press and called for the decriminalization of defamation. He also solicited views on how to advance positive change in Algeria's legal system (ref F).

-- On June 25, following a June 10 lawyers' strike, the Ambassador met with Abdelmadjid Sellini, president of the Algerian Bar Association. In this meeting, the Ambassador underscored the importance of legal reform and the need for an independent judiciary. He also described the ABA's MEPI-funded work on legal reform in Algeria and sought Sellini's support for it.

-- The Ambassador met Djamel Aidouni, Secretary General of the Judges' Union, on July 2. In the meeting, he underscored the importance of legal reform and the need for an independent judiciary. He also described the ABA's MEPI-funded work on legal reform in Algeria, and urged Aidouni to support it.

#### MEETINGS WITH POLITICAL PARTIES

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17. (C) During the summer months, political parties are not very active in Algeria. However, on June 10 and as part of the visit of DRL DAS Erica Barks-Ruggles, DCM hosted a dinner with members of both government and opposition political parties. DCM and DAS Barks-Ruggles stressed U.S. support for human rights and advocated in favor of the decriminalization of defamation.

-- On June 18, Poloff met with Lakhdar Benkhellaf, National Secretary of the "Djaballah wing" of the opposition Islamic

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political party Islah. In the meeting, poloff stressed the importance of an open, democratic system, in which Algerian citizens are provided real choices and in which they can actively participate.

#### MEETINGS WITH THE GOVERNMENT

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18. (C) The Embassy has actively sought meetings with various government actors to promote the Freedom Agenda.

-- On June 9 and as part of the visit of DRL DAS Erica Barks-Ruggles, the Ambassador met with Farouk Ksentini, president of the GOA's National Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights. Both DAS Barks-Ruggles and Ambassador stressed U.S. support for human rights and called for the decriminalization of defamation.

-- On June 10 and as part of the visit of DRL DAS Erica Barks-Ruggles, DCM met with Messaoud Boufercha, Secretary General (no. 2) at the Ministry of Justice. Both DAS Barks-Ruggles and DCM stressed U.S. support for legal reform, highlighting the MEPI-funded work in Algeria done by the ABA. They also advocated in favor of the decriminalization of defamation.

-- The Ambassador met with Cheikh Bouamrane, president of the GOA's High Islamic Council, to discuss religious freedom in Algeria June 12.

-- As a follow-up to the visit of DRL DAS Erica Barks-Ruggles, the Ambassador hosted Farouk Ksentini, president of the GOA's National Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, for lunch June 19. The Ambassador again underscored U.S. support for human rights and advocated for the decriminalization of defamation.

-- The Ambassador met with Justice Minister Tayeb Belaiz July 29 to discuss the ABA's program to help professionalize actors in Algeria's legal system and to increase citizen awareness of their rights (ref G).

#### GOING FORWARD

19. (C) Following our relocation into a new Embassy compound at the end of September, we intend to continue and to expand this regular round of encounters with human rights activists, political party members and government officials. For FY 2008, Embassy Algiers has developed a robust list of IVLPs that target civil society, media, and government individuals whom we have identified as potential agents of change. The IVLPs will emphasize press freedom and judicial reform. Our new Embassy facility will also enable us to make effective and frequent use of our DVC capabilities. In June in our current facility, we hosted a DVC on Guantanamo Bay detainees. Starting in October, we have planned DVCs on counterterrorism, U.S. foreign policy and trafficking in persons. Embassy Algiers will also expand use of our newly created Embassy alumni association to reinforce the President's message on individual freedom and the ability of the individual to promote positive change. (Note: In May 2007, we hosted an initial reception of over 150 individuals that have participated in U.S. Government-sponsored programs. The event was a success and included many individuals that have returned to their communities with positive views of the United States.)

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